According to the same informant, some warriors from this village had returned from a war a few days previously, bringing back with them the mummified heads of two of their enemies, necklaces of human teeth, and other trophies.

As it turned out, I did not regret my choice, for I was well received in Necodemus and I encountered there, more vivid than anywhere else, the legend of Manduruca beginnings which considers this very maloca or village the cradle of the human race.

I continued up the Cadervri, Paraúna river. Every day we had to carry bodily our light boat over sand bars. Here was confirmed an opinion I had already formed, namely, that the Cadervri, as well as the Araguaia, Juruena, Manuel, and other upper branches of the great southern tributaries of the Amazon, such as the Tocantins, the Tapajos, the Madeira and others, would dry up completely during the summer months, losing their channels, were it not for the falls of the middle course which serve to dam up the violent flow of the stream. The average gradient on the middle course of these great Amazon tributaries, which descend from the central plateau, is steeper than necessary to maintain a normal flow of water. [78]

Finally, on the morning of the sixth day as calculated by the Indian, we came upon a tree thrown across the river in the form of a bridge. On the bank stood a crude hut. There was no one around. We blew a horn to call out the owner of the hut, who was probably out hunting in the nearby woods. As no one appeared, we continued our journey. I left behind some trifling gifts to mark the passage of a friendly person.

I thought it best to behave in this fashion, remembering that Lieutenant Captain Soares Pinto had been attacked and killed by the savages for having destroyed some bridges which they had laid across the river. It is impossible to proceed upriver without destroying the bridges, and it is not always feasible to replace them.

For this reason, whenever I found myself unable to replace one in the same spot -- and on that day we encountered four more bridges -- I left gifts to make up in some degree for the damage I had caused the savages. At the end of the day the river became totally impassable: we could not carry the canoe any further. Happily, at this difficult moment we found another bridge over the river and a hut upon the bank. We blew our horn persistently.

I. HABITAT AND HISTORY

The Mundurucú Indians are a tribal group of some 1,200 people living on the Tapajós River in the state of Pará, Brazil. The remnants of a formerly much more numerous population, they have maintained a considerable part of their native culture despite more than one and a half centuries of contact with Brazilian society. Linguistically, the Mundurucú are Tupian-speaking, but their language is not mutually intelligible with the so-called classical Tupian of the Brazilian littoral. Rather, they appear to form a Tupian substock in company with the near-by Shipaya, Curuaya, and Juruna Indians of the Xingú River drainage. Other cultural characteristics indicate some dissimilarity between the Mundurucú and the bulk of the Tupian-speaking peoples and suggest that Mundurucú history had a relatively independent course from that of the coastal groups. Some of these differences are manifest in mythology and religion.

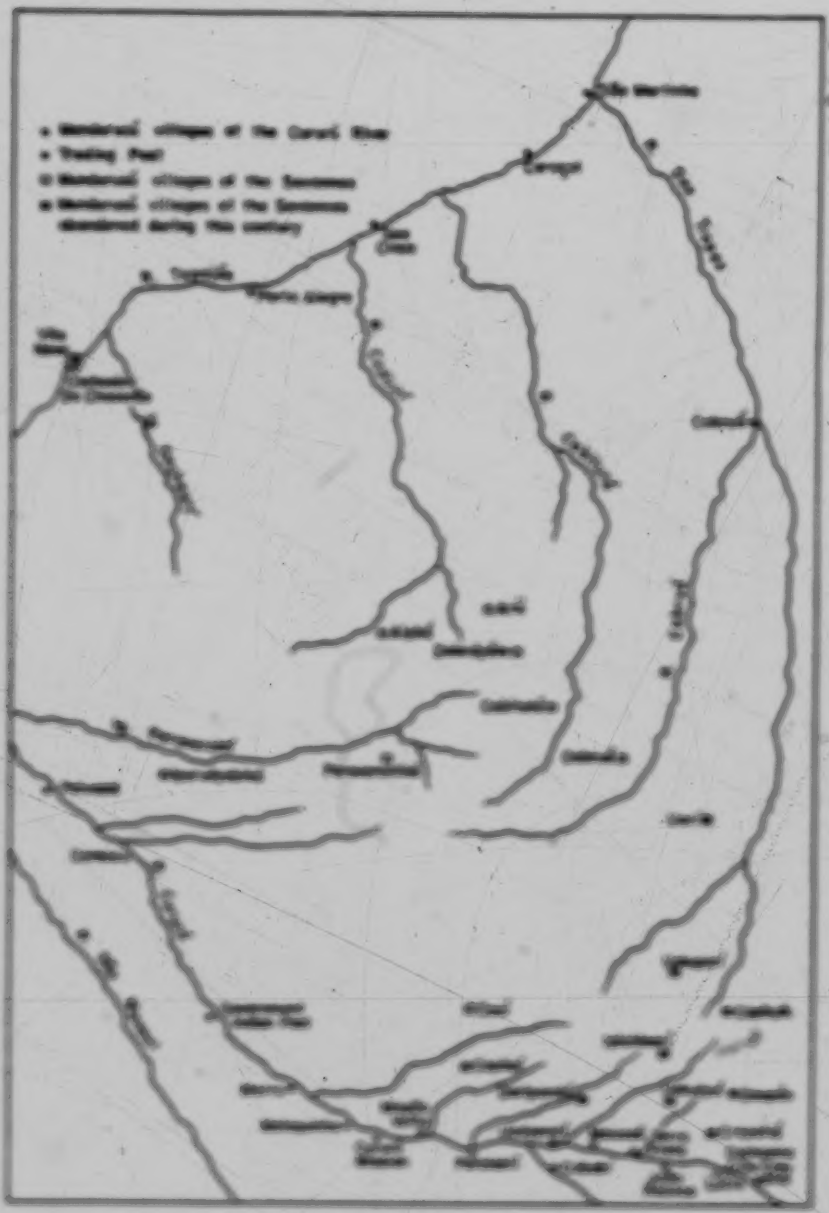
Habitat

The Mundurucú habitat is rather different from what might commonly be expected in the Amazon Valley. Although stretches of flat jungle terrain abound, the area is in a northward-reaching finger of the Planalto do Mato Grosso, the topography is characterized by low hills, and the forests are interspersed with rock outcroppings and large stretches of grassy savannah. Actually, the northernmost extension of these central Brazilian highlands overlooks the Amazon behind the city of Santarém at the mouth of the Tapajós River.

The traveler en route to the Mundurucú country usually ascends the Tapajós River from Santarém, recent completion of an emergency landing field some 200 miles upstream can shorten the weeks-long trip to a matter of two hours flight.* During the first 150 miles of the water route the steamer or launch carries one up the deep blue and usually tranquil stream between shores that are at first more than 10 miles apart, but which narrow to a width of about one mile. The hills on either side rise to a few hundred feet and are covered with the vegetation characteristic of most areas of terra firma in the Amazon. At the point where the more elevated country and the banks of the river finally merge to form a narrow gap, the Tapajós River plunges furiously over the almost impassible rapids called the Cachoeira de Maracaibo. These rapids form an effective block to navigation, and the traveler must debark and be pass them by truck or on foot. The truck and the road, which are frequently not usable, are the property of a rubber trading company that maintains warehouse and commercial facilities at the lower end of the rapids. The company town has a population of less than 1,000, but it is the metropolis and entrepôt of the upper Tapajós; one can continue for 1,000 miles further upstream without finding a settlement one-fifth that size.

The next stage of the trip is made in a shallow draft diesel launch, especially built to negotiate rapids. The shores of the lower Tapajós River are lined with pleasant sand beaches and are broken by occasional villages, but the upper reach

* The reader will find it convenient to consult the maps on pp. 2 and 3 during the following discussion.



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Map 1. Mundurucú territory and villages

11: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1958
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a. View of the savannahs southwest of the village of Colorad.

b. Forests and rubber east of Colorad, looking toward the Rio Tarauacá River.

[end plate 1]

12: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1960
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

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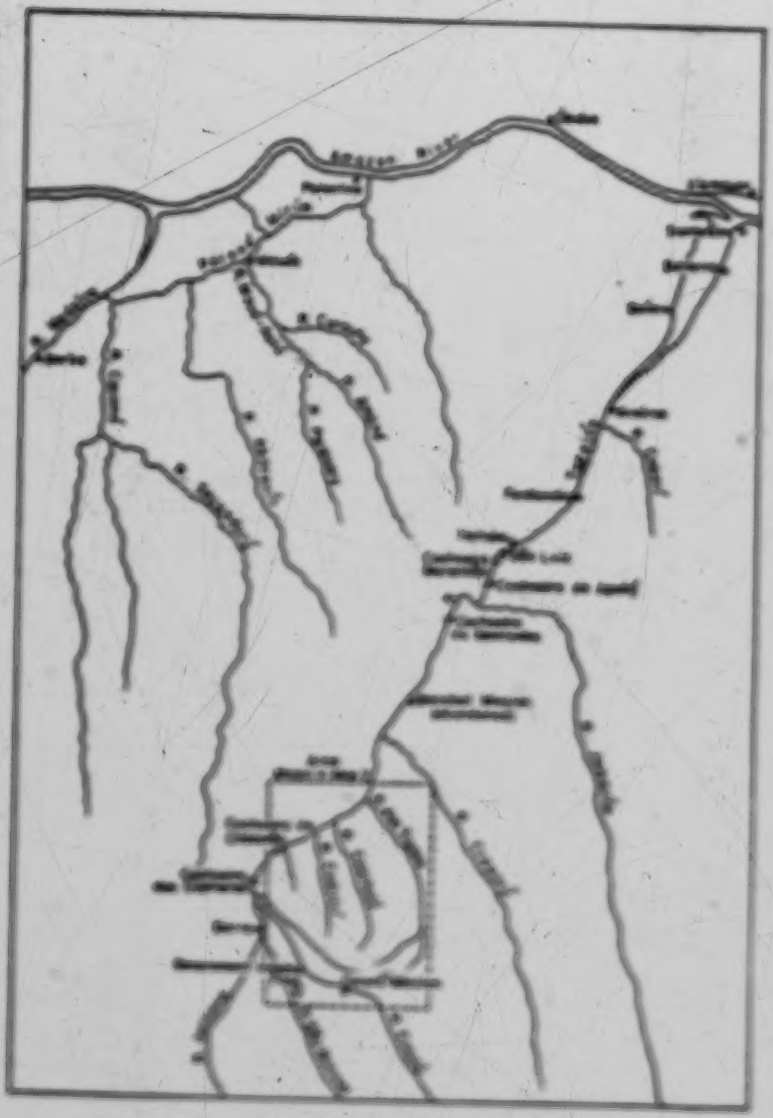

Map 1. Region of the Tapajós and lower Madeira rivers

[p 6]

12: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1960
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

as most of the population. These small one- or two-family groups do not have the social frame of reference necessary for the perpetuation of the native social system. And the social units are too small for the effective transmission of the traditional culture to the young.

Village life, relative isolation from Brazilians, greater population density, and, therefore, more intensive interaction with other Mundurucú, make for better preservation of the Indian culture among the residents of the Cururú River. But here, too, tradition is on the wane, and the native social structure has been drastically modified.

Actually, the stronghold of Mundurucú society and culture lies in the remaining savannah villages; and it is from the savannah area, once far more populous, that the contemporary dwellers of the Tapajós and Cururú rivers originally emigrated. It cannot be said that the Mundurucú of the savannah villages represent the "aboriginal culture," for they too have been deeply affected and altered by Brazilian society. But change has been the least among this population. A greater degree of political and economic autonomy is preserved, and the native social system persists, although it has been subjected to modifications. Society and culture in the savannah is certainly not the same as one hundred fifty or even fifty years ago, but it is still more distinctively Mundurucú than in the Cururú villages and far more so than among the scattered Indians of the Tapajós River.

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Planalto do Mato Grosso is a largely forested and rugged upland, ranging in altitude from 2,000 to 3,000 feet, which forms the divide between the streams flowing north to the Amazon and south to the Paraguay River. The headwaters of the Madeira, Tapajós, Xingú, and Araguaya

12: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1960
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

133 rivers rise there as small streams meandering through gallery forest. As they flow south, they increase greatly in volume, and their valleys cut deeper into the uplands, tumbling over waterfalls and dropping through strong rapids on their descent to sea level. The forest on either shore becomes vast and deep, but in the interior, the Planalto scenery continues, for the high country extends in long fingers between the rivers and reaches north in some places to the very shores of the Amazon. This is uninhabited, and largely unknown, terrain; its rivers are small, and delightfully cool and swift, and the landscape is characterized by open savannahs, flat hills, and fantastic rock formations.

The Tapajós River proper begins at approximately 7½° S lat. and is formed by the confluence of the Juruena and São Manoel rivers. For about 300 miles below this point, it flows through a valley that is in places broad and flat—typical Amazonian scenery—but is more commonly hilly. There are numerous rapids in this stretch, but none so spectacular and dangerous as the Cachoeira (Rapids) de Maranhão, at which point the river passes through a low range of hills and drops to about the same level as the Amazon. The Tapajós then continues, without further rapids north of this point another 130 miles to its confluence with the Amazon at the city of Santarém. This section of the river is by far the most beautiful. It gradually broadens to form a bay ten miles wide, bordered on either side by forested hills. Unlike most other rivers of the area, the Tapajós is blue and clear, and its lower reaches are lined in the low-water dry season by endless stretches of white sand beach.

134 The Munduruká live in the area immediately north and east of the point where the Tapajós is created by the juncture of the São Manoel and Juruena rivers. For this reason, I will refer to their habitat as being on the "upper Tapajós."

12: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1960
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

while the lands lying north of the last rapids, the Cachoeira de Maranhão, will be termed the "lower Tapajós"; this division follows local usage. The traditional location of their villages has been in a high and hilly area inland from the Tapajós, between the Cururú and Tropas rivers. This is a region of mixed savannah and forest in which several minor tributaries of the Tapajós have their headwaters. Topographically, this high savannah land is a continuation of the Serra do Cachimbo; it extends northwestward through the Mundurucú country and across the Tapajós at the Cachoeiras de Capoeira and Chacorão. Beyond this point there is some savannah land at the headwaters of the Secundury and Abacaxis rivers, but the terrain soon flattens out into the great, forested Amazon lowland encompassed by the Negro and Madeira rivers.

The savannahs in which the Mundurucú have long dwelled are considered agreeable by Indians and Brazilians alike, although the latter do not live in the area. The villages are usually situated on high, grassy knolls, and some offer vistas of twenty miles across forests and open country, low hills, and valleys. The local streams are small, but the water is cool and pure. And the forests are far richer in game than in the more heavily settled areas of the Amazon.

The climate of the upper Tapajós follows a more pronounced wet-and-dry cycle than that of the Amazon valley proper. The rains begin in mid-September and increase in frequency and intensity for the next three months. The heaviest rains fall between January and March; then they gradually slacken until the dry season commences in June. The great extremes between wet and dry seasons can be seen from the following figures on average January and July rainfall, collected by the Cururú Mission. During 1945-1951, the average January rainfall was 420.6 mili-

[Text continues on page 15]

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Map 2. Present territory of the Munduruci Indians

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12:Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1960
SQ13 Munduruca SQ13

duction is overshadowed in value by agricultural products, cattle, and hardwoods. Some rubber is still produced at the old Ford plantations, now government-owned, at Belterra and Fordlandia, but both installations are currently mainly used for experimental cattle breeding. Commerce is correspondingly brisker on the lower Tapajós. The inhabitants are not only visited regularly by several traders, but they have access to the market facilities of small towns and the city of Santarém.

The upper Tapajós and its two main tributaries, the São Manoel and Juruena rivers, are broken by a series of heavy rapids, some of which are impassable in the dry season. The first set of rapids, the Cachoeira de Maranhão, can be passed during the flood stage of the river only with considerable danger. For this reason, a five-mile-long road was built around them early in the century with the result that the trading company that controlled the road could force the local patrons to deal only with it, and thus effectively monopolize trade on the river. This is done by allowing only freight bought from the company and destined for freightage on the company launches to be transported on the road. Several attempts at competition by passing cargo through the dangerous rapids have ended in failure. Whatever company has controlled the two-way trade of rubber export and consumer-goods import has been able to fix consumer prices at whatever the market would bear. These prices have usually been too high to keep a stable, permanent working force, and there has been a chronic labor shortage on the Tapajós, even after the great rubber boom ended. The prices charged by the company for freight and goods are based on a cost index already made high by lack of the deep-water transportation available on the lower Tapajós. On the upper river, the rapids force the use of shallow-draft diesel launches